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ABSTRACT

One of the key episodes in the history of the region of Australia called Tasmania is an incident known as the Risdon Massacre. In 1804 near the Risdon Settlement, a large number of aborigines were killed by settlement officials. This document invites students to investigate what really happened on the day of the Risdon massacre and in so doing, provides historical background on the settlement and its fate. A number of activities, many of which involve primary sources, are included throughout the book, as well as follow-up activities and a bibliography. (DB)

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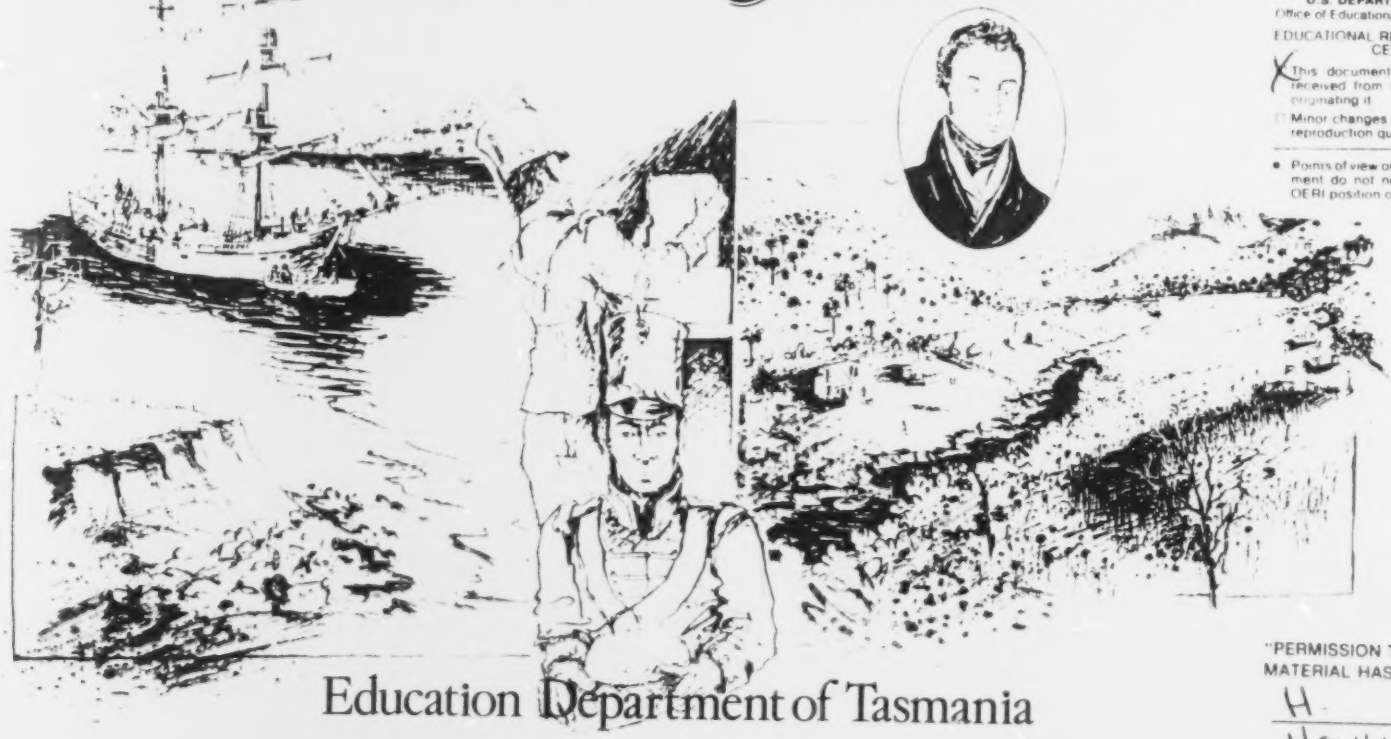
The Risdon Settlement



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The Risdon Settlement

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Acknowledgements

The idea for ***The Risdon Settlement*** originated in the Tasmanian Social Science Teachers Association's decision to prepare materials about key episodes in Tasmania's history. ***The Risdon Settlement*** is the first in what we hope will be a series of publications about Tasmania's past.

The Association would like to thank Robert Frew of New Norfolk High School for compiling the original manuscript, Warren Brewer and Brian Best for their professional advice and support, and Murray Yaxley, Sharon Webb and Malcolm Kays for the ideas which they and their colleagues in the Curriculum Centre developed for the Risdon Cove Historic Site Project. In particular the Association would like to acknowledge the original research of Geoff Lennox (National Parks and Wildlife) whose booklet, ***The First Settlement in Tasmania*** (Education Department and National Parks and Wildlife, Hobart, 1983), proved an invaluable reference. Finally we would like to thank the many teachers of the Southern Branch of the Association who have supported this project so energetically.

Social Science Teachers Association
Hobart, 1986

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The Risdon Massacre

At about eleven o'clock on the morning of May 3rd 1804, shots rang out at the small settlement at Risdon Cove on the Derwent River. When the shooting stopped many Aborigines lay wounded or dying.

On the morning of the Risdon massacre, a servant named Edward White was hoeing ground near a creek when he looked up to see a large number of natives moving down the valley. There were men, women and children, and they seemed to be chasing kangaroos in a semi-circular pattern. White was not afraid for his safety. He reported what he had seen to some soldiers and then continued with his work. White noticed that the natives carried no spears.

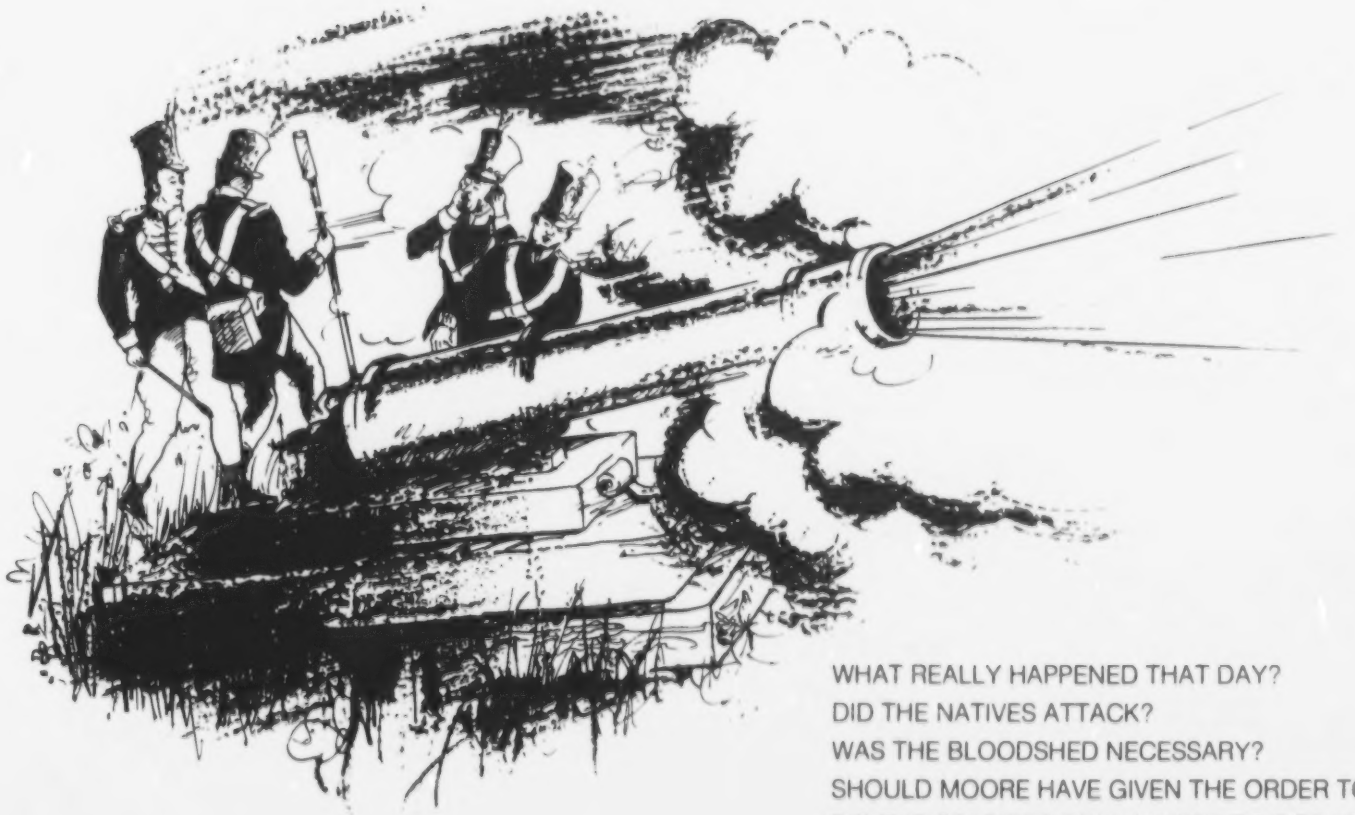
Lieutenant William Moore was in charge of the settlement that day; Lieutenant Bowen, the officer in command, was absent exploring the Huon River. Moore saw a large group of natives approach with spears. He was convinced that they intended to attack the camp. The Aborigines surrounded the camp. Moore and some soldiers moved closer to the natives. The large number of Aborigines and their warlike appearance led Moore to believe they were about to attack.

A message arrived: some Aborigines were attacking the settler Birt, in an outlying hut. Lieutenant Moore quickly ordered two of the soldiers to go to Birt's rescue, but to fire only if necessary. The two soldiers went and they did open fire. One native was killed outright; a second died in a nearby valley from wounds received.

Meanwhile another drama was unfolding back at the settlement. A large group of Aborigines had moved into the camp. Moore was thinking about a course of action when Mountgarret, the surgeon, suggested they fire one of the small cannons to scare off the natives. A cannon was fired. The confused blacks ran off up the valley; many were wounded. Mountgarret and some soldiers followed and more natives were fired upon and hit.

Edward White, the servant, had heard the firing begin. He did not know

how many Aborigines had been slaughtered. Lieutenant Moore later wrote that only three Aborigines were killed, but some estimate the figure might have been as high as fifty. White believed that Mountgarret had sent some of the Aborigines' bones in two casks to Port Jackson (later named Sydney).



WHAT REALLY HAPPENED THAT DAY?

DID THE NATIVES ATTACK?

WAS THE BLOODSHED NECESSARY?

SHOULD MOORE HAVE GIVEN THE ORDER TO OPEN FIRE?

DID THE SOLDIERS REALLY NEED TO FIRE AT THE ABORIGINES?

Much later on, in 1830, a committee was set up to try to find out what had happened.

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Investigation into the Massacre

Imagine you are a member of the investigation committee that was set up in 1830. You would want to hear what the witnesses had to say. Begin by reading what Lieutenant Moore had reported to Governor Collins in 1804:

Lieutenant Moore's Letter to Governor Collins
May 17th, 1804

Sir,

I would like to tell you that the attack on the Aborigines three days ago was their own fault; they attacked us first.

I know this because there was such a large group of them and many of them had spears. But we did not fire on them until they attacked a settler's wife and my own servant. They surrounded the camp, so I went towards them with five soldiers. They were not very friendly and Mr Mountgarret suggested that we should fire one of the carronades to frighten them away, so we did. They ran away and Mr Mountgarret took some soldiers and convicts, to follow them up the valley. Some Aborigines were bleeding.

Mr Birt, the settler, was also attacked at his farm. I sent two soldiers to help him, but I told them to fire their guns only if they had to. The soldiers shot at the natives and killed two of them.

I hope I have told you all you want to know.

William Moore,
Lieutenant NSW Corps

As a member of the committee you would want to find out if Moore had acted in the right way.

ACTIVITY

1. Think of 5 questions you would ask Lieutenant Moore. Write them down.
   After you have written each question, write down how you think the answer to your question would help your investigation.

It would seem from Moore's letter that the natives were hostile and that Moore was simply protecting the settlers. But Edward White, an eyewitness to the massacre, gives a different account:

Edward White's Account of the Massacre

'On May 3rd, 1804, (I) was hoeing ground near a creek; (I) saw 300 of the Natives come down in a circular form, and a flock of kangaroos hemmed in between them; there were men, women and children; "they looked at me with all their eyes". I went down to the creek, and reported them to some soldiers, and then went back to my work; the natives did not threaten me; I was not afraid of them; Clark's house was near where I was at work, and Burke's house near Clark's house; the Natives were never within half a quarter of a mile of Burke's house; and Natives did not attack the soldiers; they would not have molested them; the firing commenced about 11 o'clock; there were a great many of the Natives slaughtered and wounded; I don't know how many; some of their bones were sent in two casks to Port Jackson by Dr Mountgarret; they went in the *Ocean*; a boy was taken from them; this was three or four months after we landed; they never came so close again afterwards; they had no spears with them; only waddies; they were hunting and came down into a bottom; there were hundreds and hundreds of kangaroo about Risdon then, and all over where Hobart Town now stands; the Natives were driven from their houses afterwards, and their wives and children were taken from them by stock-keepers; lived three years as a shepherd in the Western Tier; was always afraid of them; afraid they would kill him; they often fell in with him; never pursued him; they carried spears in the bush; he never carried a gun; the soldiers came down from their own camp to the creek to attack the Natives; I could show all the ground; Mr Clark was there; the Natives were close to his house; they were not on Burke's side of the creek; never heard that any of them went to Burke's side of the creek; never heard that any of them went to Burke's house; is sure they did not know there was a white man in the country when they came down to Risdon.

'The Natives leave their women and children behind them when they are going to war; believes the largest Natives were at Prosser's Plains; does not know any difference between the Natives of New South Wales and here; "those at Port Jackson are savager".'[1]

White's evidence seems to conflict with that given by Moore.

ACTIVITY

1. Write 5 questions you would ask Edward White.
2. Write down what you would hope to learn from your questions.
3. Make a list of the differences between Lieutenant Moore's version of the massacre and Edward White's version.
4. A good judge would want to consider *all* the sides of the conflict. If possible, he or she might like to hear what the Aborigines had to say.
   Imagine you are one of the Aborigines who was there on May 3rd, 1804. Write what happened from your point of view. How did you *feel*?
5. Ask your teacher if you and your classmates can re-enact the massacre. You could re-enact the events from the different points of view of Moore, White and the Aborigines.
6. As a member of the committee, you now have to write an official report. Well, what really did happen? What is your opinion? Was anyone to blame? Did fear have anything to do with what happened? Write your report.

   An extract from the official report of 1830 is included on page 6.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Visit the Risdon Cove site to find additional information about the massacre so that you can determine which account of the events (White's or Moore's) is the more believable.
2. Videotape, or record on audiocassette, an interview with one of the witnesses:
   Edward White, or
   Lieutenant Moore, or
   An Aborigine in the 'hunting' party.
3. With your teacher's help, your class could try out the following activities:
   (i) *Observe* a 'staged' event, like a playground scuffle between two students.
   (ii) *Record* in writing what was observed.
   (iii) *Compare* the discrepancies in the written accounts.
   (iv) *Discuss* why there were differences in the written accounts.
4. What are the problems that face an historian when he/she wishes to find out about what really happened on a particular occasion?
5. Should every statement in a history book be taken as the truth?

The Risdon Massacre: An Extract from the Official Report of the Investigation Committee, 1830

In 1830 Governor Arthur's investigation committee found difficulty in understanding what really took place. The following is a relevant part of the Committee's report.

'The first act of decided hostility was committed at Risdon, on the eastern shore of the Derwent, at which place the settlement was under the command of Lieutenant Moore, of the 102nd Regiment. This occurrence took place the 3rd May 1804, and the Committee have some difficulty in deciding whether it is to be considered as (being started) by the Natives, calling forth measures of self-defence, or an attack upon them commenced by the settlers and military, under an impression that an attempt was about to be made upon the position, by the unusually (large) number of the Natives who had made their appearance in the neighbourhood. It appears unquestionable that a person named Burke, whose habitation was considerably advanced beyond the rest, was driven from it by the Natives, whose number was estimated at upwards of 500, and much violence was threatened by them towards this man and his wife and (home). But it is the opinion of some persons who were then in the Colony, that the displeasure of these people was excited only by finding this hut erected upon ground to which, as being favourably situated for water and hunting, they were in the habit of (using) and on which they were preparing at this time to hold a general assembly; and that they had no more hostile intention than to remove this obstacle to their proceedings; . . . it is (thought) by one, who was an eye witness that they did not proceed even to this extent of aggression. Their having been accompanied by their women and children, whom when engaged in expeditions of danger, they are known to be in the habit of leaving in a place of security, is a circumstance strongly in favour of the opinion, that they had in view no other than a peaceful purpose, and that they were not the first assailants.'[2]

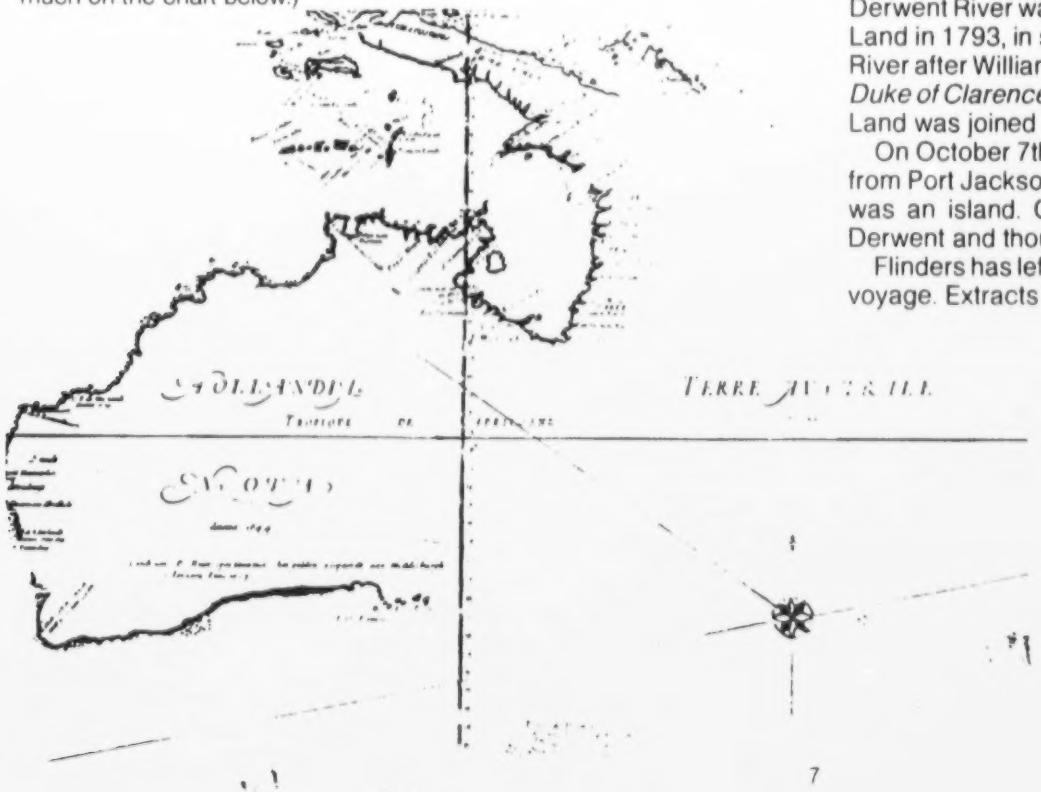
ACTIVITY

1. Does this report agree with your own 'report'? If so, in what way?

Reasons for the First Settlement at Risdon Cove

Early European Exploration

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many European countries sent expeditions to explore southern waters, in the hope of expanding trade. In 1642 the Dutchman Abel Tasman visited Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). By 1666 a good deal of the western coastline of New Holland (Australia) had been mapped. (You can see how much on the chart below.)



ACTIVITIES

1. **Look at the map. What evidence is there that Dutch seamen discovered the western coast of Australia?**
2. **What errors, if any, can you find on the map?**

Towards the end of the eighteenth century English seamen began to visit Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). The English discoverer of the Derwent River was Lieutenant John Hayes. He visited Van Diemen's Land in 1793, in search of spices. He named the Risdon Creek and River after William Risdon, the second officer on one of his ships, the *Duke of Clarence*. At that time all seamen thought that Van Diemen's Land was joined to the mainland.

On October 7th, 1798, George Bass and Matthew Flinders set out from Port Jackson to sail around Van Diemen's Land to prove that it was an island. On board their ship, the *Norfolk*, they visited the Derwent and thought it an excellent site for a settlement.

Flinders has left us several descriptions of what he observed on his voyage. Extracts from his observations are given on pages 8—10.

Extracts from

Observations on the Coast of Van Diemen's Land, Bass Strait and its Islands

by Matthew Flinders, 1798-1799

... The River Derwent appears to have been the discovery of Mr Hayes, commander of the ship *Duke*, about 1793. With the exception of Herdsman's Cove, the names that are applied in this river and its immediate neighbourhood, were taken from his chart, but in such parts as the sloop visited, it was found necessary to make some alterations in the terms: coves having been called ports and bays, and creeks, rivers. The river itself, is denominated Fletcher Hayes's Gulph, in the lower part, and Derwent towards its head; but, as it is certainly nothing more than a common river, I have dropped the name of gulph, and affixed Derwent River as the name of the whole ...

* * * *

... Herdsman's Cove being unnoticed in Mr Hayes's chart, has received a name descriptive of the country that surrounds it; and it is the only name given by me in this part of Van Dieman's (sic) Land; save those in the upper part of Frederick Henry Bay, and Cape Basaltes, which are also descriptive ...

* * * * *

... Three observations were taken for the latitude in different parts of this river. Mount Direction is in 42-degrees 48-minutes south. The mean variation of the azimuth compass and theodolite, observed on the south side of Risdon Cove, in December, 1798, was 8-degrees 52-minutes east ...

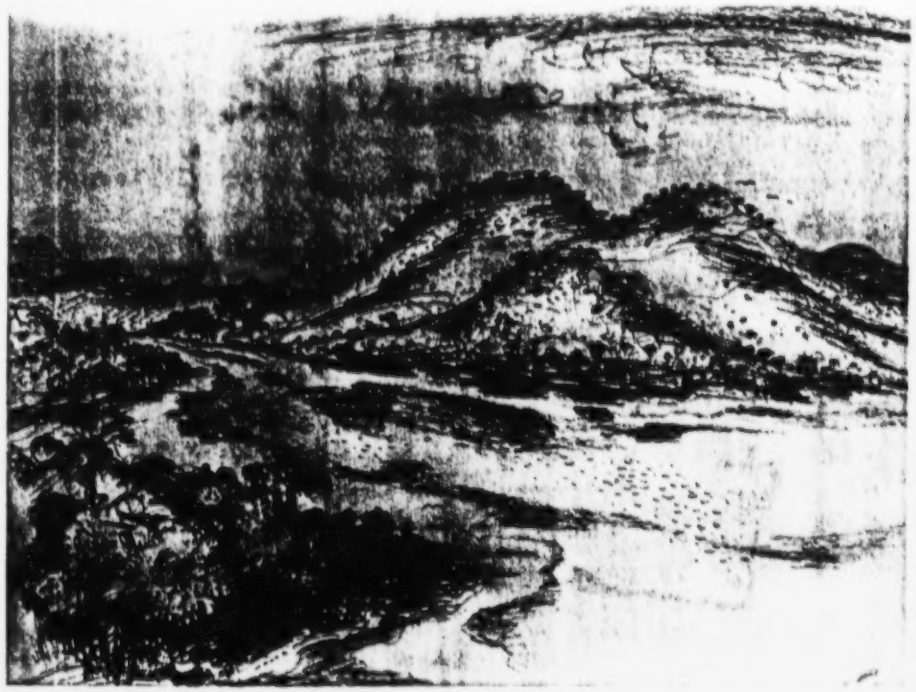
* * * * *

... Venomous snakes are found here, which so much resemble burnt sticks, that it requires a close inspection to detect them. One was taken alive, but died soon afterwards, apparently in consequence of his own bite ...

* * * * *

... The banks of the Derwent are not remarkable for their height; but on the east side, the hills rise suddenly from the water, whilst the west side ascends gradually up to a large body of mountain; the summit of which is four or five miles inland. This mountain is the parent of all the streams that fall into the river on that side; and is sufficiently high to be seen over the land in almost all parts of Frederick Henry Bay. Mr Bass found it covered with large timber, to its very top. In the fresh part of the river, the hills rise rather suddenly from the water-side; and the country seems to be hilly, if not mountainous ...

* * * * *



'. . . The borders of the river are, in general, much better calculated for pasturage than for agriculture. They are covered with grass, equally dispersed over a good, but sometimes shallow, soil. The hills descend with so gradual a slope, that they usually leave a considerable extent of valley; and the depth and goodness of the soil, in many of these vallies, seem very fit for the plough. . . .'

* * * * *

'. . . The stream that falls into Risdon Cove, runs out of an extensive valley, that in the disposition of the ground, exceeds in beauty every other that was met with. Round Herdsman's Cove, the country is unusually thin of timber, and finely rounded into grassy hills. Upon the tops of these hills, as upon most others, it is usually stony; but in some of the vallies, the soil is capable of a profitable cultivation. . . .'

* * * * *

'. . . The remarkably formed peninsula, that surrounds Ralph's Bay, is tolerably good ground; and about the Shoal Lagoon, there is some of a superior depth of soil. Was a settlement to be formed in this neighbourhood, Ralph's Bay would deserve particular attention. . . .'

* * * * *

'. . . The stone about the Derwent is sometimes basaltic, and often contains iron. From its great weight, it is well calculated for ballast; and in many places, as in Risdon Cove, may be conveniently taken into a boat. . . .'

* * * * *

'. . . The land at the head of Risdon creek, on the east side, seems preferable to any other on the banks of the Derwent. The creek runs winding between two steep hills, and ends in a chain of ponds that extends into a fertile valley of great beauty. For half a mile above the head of the creek, the valley is contracted and narrow; but the soil is extremely rich, and the fields are well covered with grass. Beyond this it suddenly expands, and becomes broad and flat at the bottom, whence arise long grassy slopes, that by a gentle but increasing ascent continue to mount the hills on each side, until they are hidden from the view by the woods of large timber which overhang their summits. With this handsome disposition of the ground, the valley extends several miles to the S.E. in the figure of a small segment of a circle. The tops of its hills, though stoney, produce abundance of tall timber, which, as it descends the slopes, diminishes in size, and thins off to a few scattered she-oaks and gum trees, interspersed with small coppices of the beautiful flowering fern. . . .'

* * * * *

'. . . The soil along the bottom, and to some distance up the slopes, is a rich vegetable mould, apparently hardened by a small mixture of clay, which grows a large quantity of thick, juicy grass, and some few patches of close underwood ...'[3]

ACTIVITIES

1. Find an atlas which has a good map of Hobart and the surrounding river. See if you can locate all of the points mentioned by Flinders.
2. Make a list of all the things in Flinders' extract which might influence you to settle in Risdon Cove. When making your list, think about the methods of transport that were availble at the time.

The French Take An Interest

A French expedition under Baudin showed interest in what Bass and Flinders had shown to be an island. Baudin investigated the Derwent river in January 1802. But the crews of his ships caught scurvy and were running short of food, so Baudin sailed to Port Jackson in New South Wales.

When Baudin's two ships sailed from Port Jackson on November 18, 1802, it was rumoured that the French intended to make a settlement in Van Diemen's Land.

The Governor of New South Wales, Philip King, was worried. He did not want the French to gain a foothold on the island. Britain and France were not on friendly terms at this time and were struggling against each other in many places around the world. Governor King wrote to Lord Hobart, the British Secretary of State, setting out his plans to claim Van Diemen's Land for the British.

The French ships ***Geographe*** and ***Naturaliste,*** under the command of Captain Baudin, leave Port Jackson sailing south.

King acted quickly. A small armed schooner, the ***Cumberland,*** sailed from Port Jackson on November 23, 1802. The schooner was under the command of Lieutenant Robbins who had instructions to sail south to Van Diemen's Land to raise the British flag and plant seed. When Robbins arrived off King Island on December 8, 1802, he found the two French ships already at anchor. Lieutenant Robbins delivered a note to Captain Baudin warning him that the British intended to claim Van Diemen's Land.

For an uneasy week the French and English ships shared Sea Elephant Bay on the coast of King Island. On December 14 the English decided to stake their claim with a formal landing - they marched to where the French were camped and raised the British flag. To the sound of three loud cheers the island was 'possessed' in the name of King George of England.

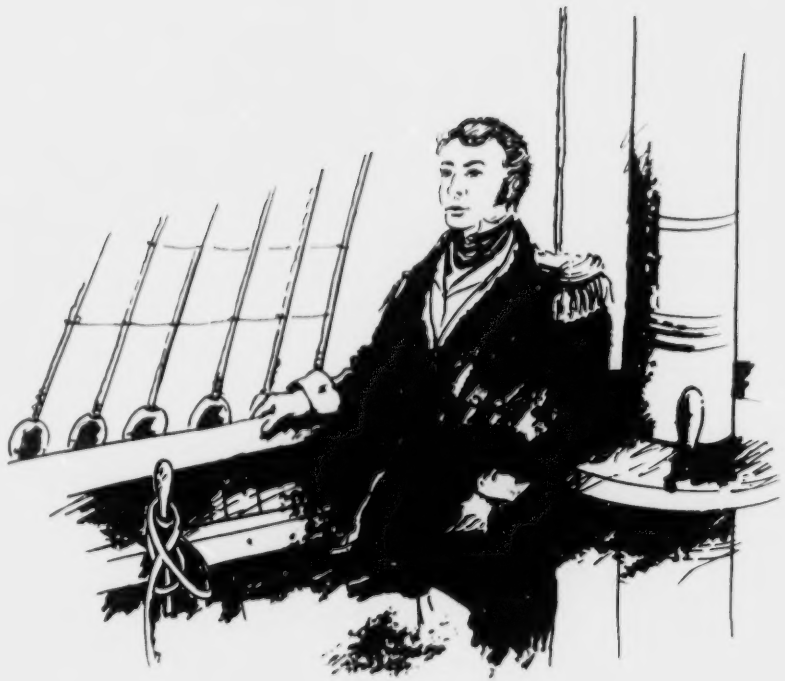
Later on Baudin wrote to Governor King denying that the French were interested in settling Van Diemen's Land. In late December Baudin sailed westwards; he died in Mauritius only a few months later.

Early in March, 1803, John Bowen arrived at Port Jackson. He was only 23 years old, but he must have been very self-confident. He wrote to Governor King offering his services as the leader of any new settlement that Governor King might be planning. King promptly accepted because he was still concerned about the 'threat' of the French. He thought the best way to 'claim' Van Diemen's Land would be to start a settlement there before the French did. Governor King explained his plans in a letter to Lord Nepean.

Governor King's Letter to Lord Nepean

'In my letter of the 23rd of November last I informed you that I had sent a Colonial Vessel to Basses Straits, the particulars of which I had communicated to the Secretary of State. It was reported to me soon after the French Ships sailed that a principal object of their voyage was to fix on a place at Van Dieman's (sic) Land for Settlement, and that the French Officers who had talked of it had pointed out a particular place, i.e. what the French call Baie du Nord in Storm Bay Passage; with this information I considered it my duty to establish His Majesty's Right to that island.

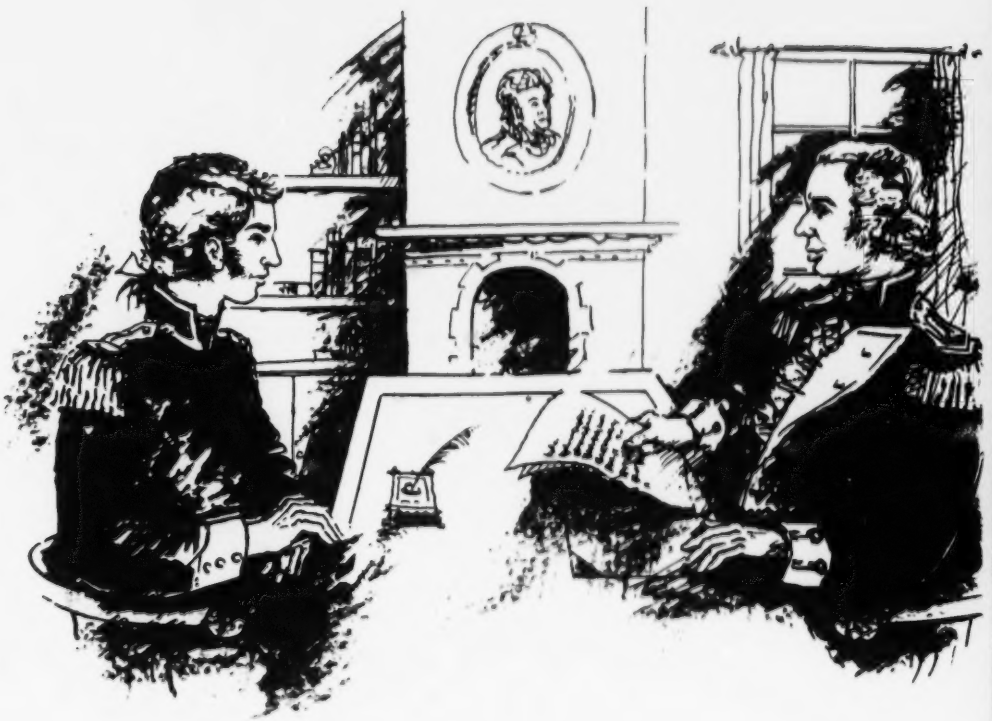
'Under all these circumstances I judged it expedient to form a settlement at Risdon Cove in the River Derwent, the situation of which their Lordships will observe in Captain Flinder's Chart of Storm Bay Passage in Van Dieman's (sic) Land; this measure I should have taken sooner if I had any proper person to send on that service; on the *Glatton's* arrival, Lieut. Bowen of that Ship offered his services, and being recommended by Captain Colnett who gave his consent, I took it upon me to appoint Mr Bowen in conjunction with the Commander of the *Porpoise* to fix on a suitable place, and command the intended settlement until I may receive instructions on that subject. As no medical assistance could be spared from the Colony, and the Surgeon of the *Glatton* having Captain Colnett's consent and recommendation I appointed him to the medical duty of the intended settlement where his assistance to Lieut. Bowen will be very useful. My reasons for making this settlement are: the necessity there appears of preventing the French gaining a footing on the east side of these Islands; to divide the convicts; to secure another place for procuring timber, with any other natural production that may be discovered and found useful; the advantage that may be expected by raising grain; and to promote the seal fishery. For these reasons and Utility of a Naval Officer's conducting a settlement of that kind I was induced to accept Lieut. Bowen's offer and Captain Colnett's recommendation which I hope will meet their Lordships' Approbation. It is my intention to dispatch the *Porpoise* and *Lady Nelson* on this service as soon as possible after the ***Glatton's*** departure.'[4]



John Bowen, a young naval lieutenant in his early twenties, arrived at Port Jackson on the H.M.S. *Glatton* in March 1803. He offered to lead the settlement on Van Diemen's Land, and Governor King agreed.

ACTIVITIES

1. Make a list of Governor King's reasons for starting a settlement at Risdon Cove.
2. If you had been Governor King, would you have decided upon Risdon Cove for a site? Why/why not? Write down your answer.
3. If the French had settled Tasmania first, what differences would that have made to Tasmania's history?
4. Find out about scurvy. What caused it to be such a problem for sailors?
5. What other problems, besides scurvy, would sailors have had to put up with?
6. How did sea explorers navigate? How did people like Cook and Baudin check their latitude and longitude? You could perhaps interview someone from a local sailing club.
7. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the French, Dutch and British explored and settled many parts of the world. The French and British were particularly keen rivals. On a map of the world mark in those lands that France and Britain claimed for their empires.
8. Why did people like Governor King think they could 'claim' Van Diemen's Land? What do you think were their attitudes towards the Aborigines?



Governor King's Letter Giving Command of Risdon Cove to Bowen

Lieutenant Bowen received his orders from Governor King on March 28, 1803:

'With these Instructions you will receive my appointment for commanding and superintending the settlement intended to be formed at the River Derwent on Van Diemen's Land; and to obey all such orders as you shall from time to time receive from me, His Majesty's Governor-in-Chief and Captain-General of the territory of New South Wales and its dependencies, or from the Lieutenant-Governor in my absence, or other officer administering the Government for the time being.

'You are, therefore, to proceed in His Majesty's armed vessel *Porpoise*, or *Lady Nelson*, tender, whose commanders have my orders to receive you, with the men, women, stores, and provisions necessary for forming the intended settlement; on a proper place about Risdon's Cove.

'After having taken the necessary measures for securing yourself and the people, and for the preservation of the stores and provisions, you will proceed to the clearing of ground on the public account for the cultivation of wheat and other plants, with the seeds of which you are furnished.

'You will take with you six months' provisions, within which time you will receive an additional supply; but, as you may be able to procure fish, you are to make the provisions you receive serve you as long as possible.'[5]

(Dated March 28, 1803.)

ACTIVITIES

1. If you were Bowen and you had to set up a colony on a remote island, what kind of people would you take with you? Make a list of these people and write down what you would expect them to do to help the settlement.
2. How can we group your list of people? (arrange and make simpler)
   - *by skills*
   - *by sex*
   - *by rank*
   - *by job*
   - *by status (importance)*
   - *by age.*

   Rearrange your list using one or two of the above headings, e.g. rank and skills.
3. How can we show these groupings? We could use bar graphs or pictograms (simple symbols.) Construct some graphs using your rearranged lists.
4. Make a list of the provisions you would take with you (for example tools, grain and things to protect you from the weather and wild animals).

The Original Landing Party (1803)

A small party of 49 people pioneered the European settlement of Van Diemen's Land. They sailed from Port Jackson in the *Lady Nelson* and the *Albion*, a South-Sea whaling ship. In addition to men, women and children, the ships also carried supplies, foodstuffs and animals. There were four distinct groups of people in the original party that landed at Risdon Cove.

The Civil Department

Lieutenant John Bowen - Commandant and Magistrate
Dr Jacob Mountgarret - Surgeon and Magistrate
Mr Thomas Wilson - Government Storekeeper

The Military

Lance-Sergeant Wexted
Seven privates
Plus three women and one child

Convicts

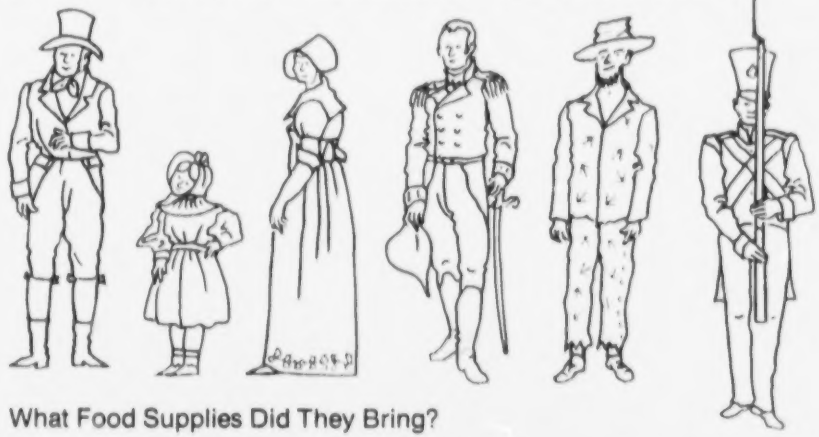
Twenty-one male convicts
- Three were employed as servants to the 'Civil Department'.
- Two were employed looking after the stock of eleven cattle and twenty-three sheep.
- One convict carried water.
- Eleven convicts made up a town work gang.
- One worked as a blacksmith.
- Two were employed as sawyers.
- One was employed as a house carpenter.

Three female convicts were engaged in cutting grass.

Free Settlers

The seven settlers included:
- William (Aaron) Birt, his wife and two children;
- Richard (William) Clark and (perhaps) his wife,
- Smith (unknown first name, a former overseer at a farm in New South Wales); and
- an unnamed man and two women who were not eligible to receive food from the Government Store at the new settlement.

Lieutenant Moore with fourteen soldiers and forty-two additional convicts arrived from Sydney late in 1803, aboard the sealing vessel, the *Dart*.



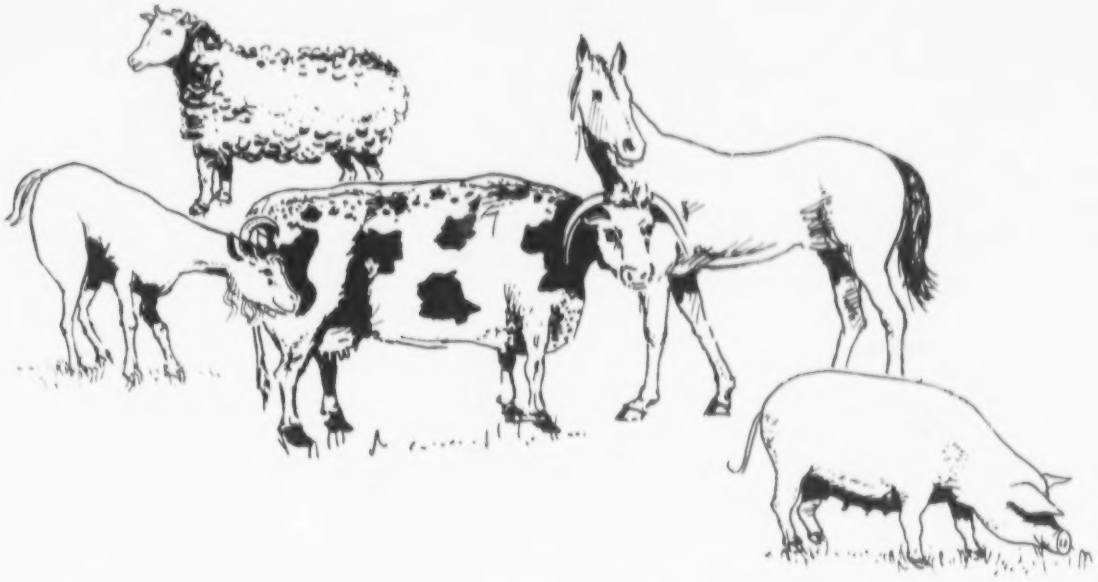
What Food Supplies Did They Bring?

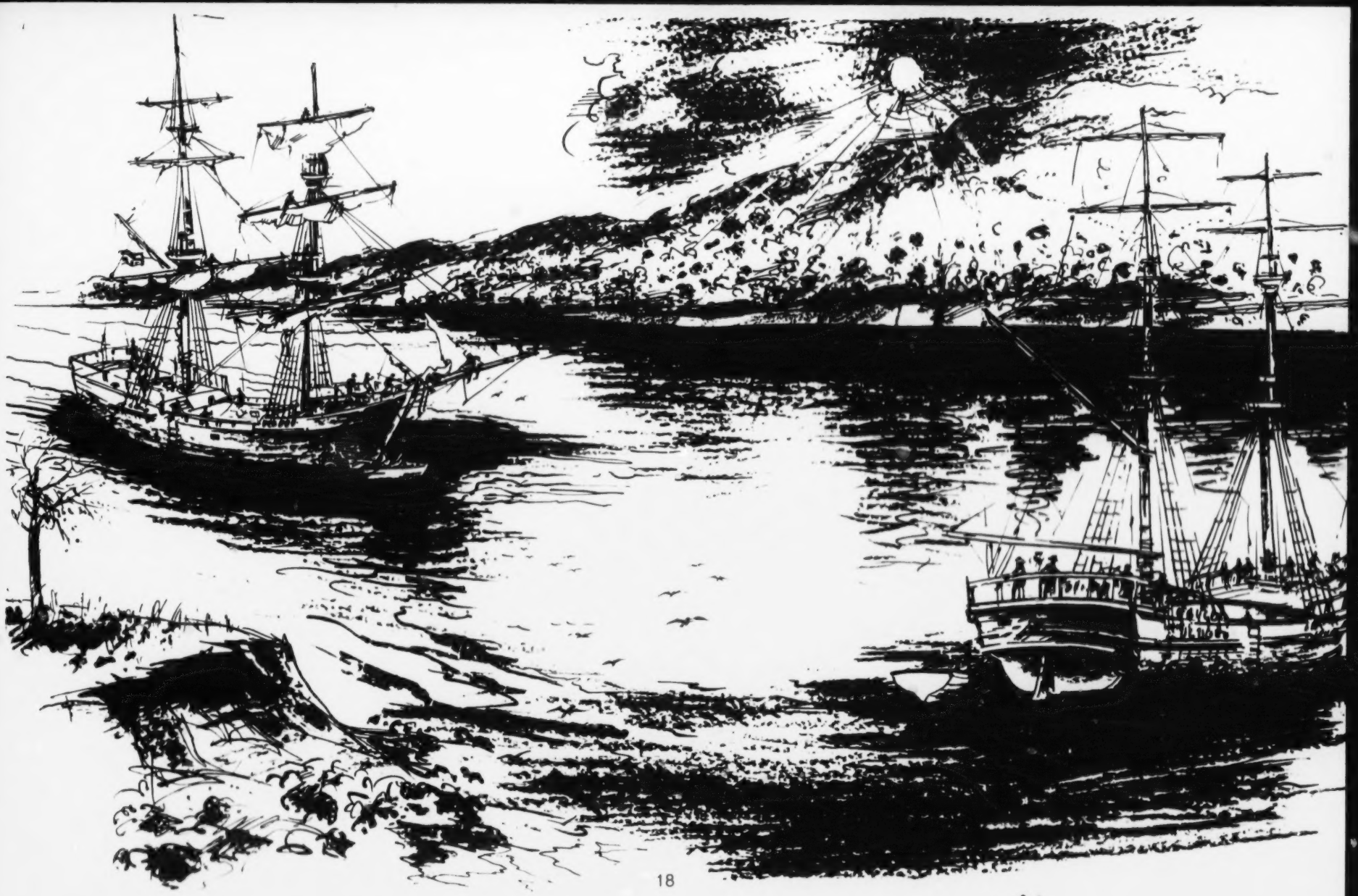
The officers and free settlers owned thirty-eight pigs, eight goats and seven sheep. In addition Lieutenant Bowen owned a mare, and Dr Mountgarret possessed a cow.

There were also nine cattle and twenty-five sheep supplied by the Government. The Government Store contained food supplies such as sugar and flour to last the settlement eight months.

ACTIVITIES

1. Read through the list of settlers again. Compare the list with the one you made up in the previous activity. What differences can you find?
2. Would you have expected the new settlement to have been successful? Why/why not? Write down your answer.





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Lieutenant Bowen's Description of his Arrival in Van Diemen's Land

The *Lady Nelson* left Port Jackson on the August 28, 1803. The *Albion*, with Bowen on board, sailed two days later. On arriving in the Derwent, Bowen wrote:

> 'After a Passage of twelve days we arrived in the Derwent ourselves all well, but the Cattle very indifferent, the effects of a severe Gale on the second day we left Port Jackson, which, notwithstanding Captain Bunker did everything in his Power, even so far as heaving the Ship to for their safety, bruized them so much that we lost one Cow, three Sheep, and four Lambs; much more Stock was lost belonging to myself and the Settlers; upon the whole I have been the greatest sufferer. On the Friday after we sailed, it being Calm, Captain Bunker was fortunate enough to kill three Sperm Whales, and it being light unfavourable weather, we anchored three days successively about Oyster Island, and was baffled with light winds two days in Frederick Henry Bay; however on Sunday the 12th, to my great satisfaction, I found the *Lady Nelson* in Risdon Cove, having been so fortunate to arrive five days before us; as I have not had Time enough to form a general plan, I shall only relate my proceedings and Opinion of the Place since I have been here; there are so many fine Spots on the borders of the River that I was a little puzzled to fix upon the best place, but there being a much better Stream of fresh water falling into Risdon Cove than into any of the others, and very extensive valleys laying at the back of it, I judged it the most convenient, and accordingly disembarked all the Men and Stores, and have been since wholly employed in securing ourselves from the Weather. We are situated on a Hill commanding a perfect view of the River and the land, with the fresh Water at the foot of it; the Land excellent. I have been up the River rather higher than Captain Flinders went and have examined Herdsman's Cove, which I am of opinion will be the best place for the Settlers, the Derwent being perfectly fresh all above it. The Banks are more like a Nobleman's Park in England than an uncultivated Country; every part is beautifully Green and very little trouble might clear every Valley I have seen in a Month, there are very few Rocky Spots except on the High Hills, and in many Places the Plough might be used immediately, but our Workmen are very few and very bad. I could with ease employ One Hundred Men upon the Land about us, and with that Number, some good Men among them, we should soon be a flourishing Colony.'[6]

Early Activity and Early Problems

What would it have been like on those first few days, setting up the new colony? The logbook of the *Lady Nelson* provides us with some tantalising details:

September 12, 1803	Stores were sent ashore in the longboat, the livestock were put ashore by lashing two boats together.
September 13, 1803	Stores were landed from the ***Albion***.
September 14, 1803	Stores were taken ashore from the ***Lady Nelson***.
September 17, 1803	Heavy rain fell.
September 19, 1803	Bricks were unloaded from the ***Lady Nelson***.
September 21, 1803	***The Albion*** leaves for Port Jackson.
September 29, 1803	The ***Lady Nelson*** leaves after taking on water.[7]

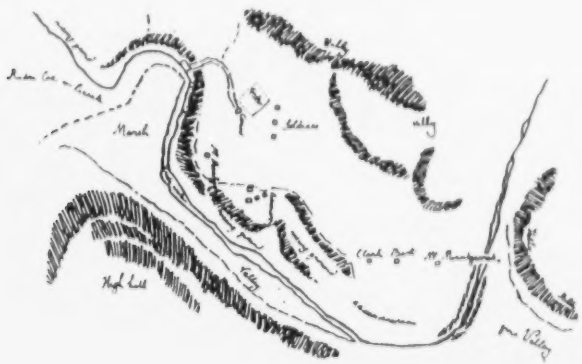
But even at this early stage things were not going well for the new settlement. Lieutenant Bowen writes:

'The Soldiers I have got are very discontented and appear to have had too easy a life for their present employment. I have only one Sentry in the Day and two at Night, which they call very hard Duty, and give me some trouble to put them to rights. I should wish, if any more Persons come down, to see an officer or a very active Sergeant with them as the present Party will be of very little use even with my Present Establishment.

'I have not seen a single Native yet, but some of the People found them on our first arrival, but they appeared very shy and have since retired entirely from us; not apprehending they would be of any use I have not made any search after them, thinking myself well off if I never see them again.

'Our Provisions and Stores are pretty correct, except a little damaged Sugar and Flour before it was landed, which I intend to send back in the *Lady Nelson*, who will sail from this place in about a Fortnight, by which Time I shall have the returns ready and shall be able to furnish you with a Plan of our Settlement.'[8]

Lieutenant Bowen's Sketch of the New Settlement (1803)



ACTIVITIES

1. From the description of the massacre given by Moore and White, use the map and see if you can work out the movements of the aborigines and the soldiers.
2. Write a diary account of the first three days in Van Diemen's Land. Assume that you are one of the settlers, (Birt, Clark, or the surgeon Mountgarret), or one of the convicts. You might like to think about these questions as you write your diary:
   (a) What does the valley look like?
   (b) Would the new surroundings be strange to the settlers from England? How would it be different?
   (c) What work do you do (e.g. setting up tents)?
   (d) What are the others doing?
   (e) Is it a good site?
   (f) Have you seen any natives?
   (g) What has the weather been like?
   (h) Is your leader Lt. Bowen pleased with the way things are going ?
3. From your diary notes write a letter home to your friends or parents back in England. Describe everything that has happened to you. Remember to say how you *feel* about being in this small settlement, in a strange new part of the world.
4. By September 20th, 1803, the little settlement was named Hobart. Who was it named after?

Fate of the Settlement

Problems for Lieutenant Bowen

Within a few months there were over thirty huts, a big stone storehouse, a blacksmith's forge, stockyards, and a few vegetable gardens. Even the future streets were marked out. However the new settlement seemed doomed to failure. The spring of 1803 was very dry. The soil which had seemed fertile, possibly due to some wet seasons in 1801 and 1802, was in fact of little use.

The convicts were ill-behaved and lazy. A few weeks after their arrival seven convicts escaped to Bass Strait in Mountgarret's longboat. They included a ring-leader named James Lewis (alias Druce Duce) and a William Esum and a Joseph Culver. Druce was described in 1821 as a wicked, lewd person of depraved and abandoned mind and disposition. He died in 1824 from wounds received from Aborigines at Port Stephens.

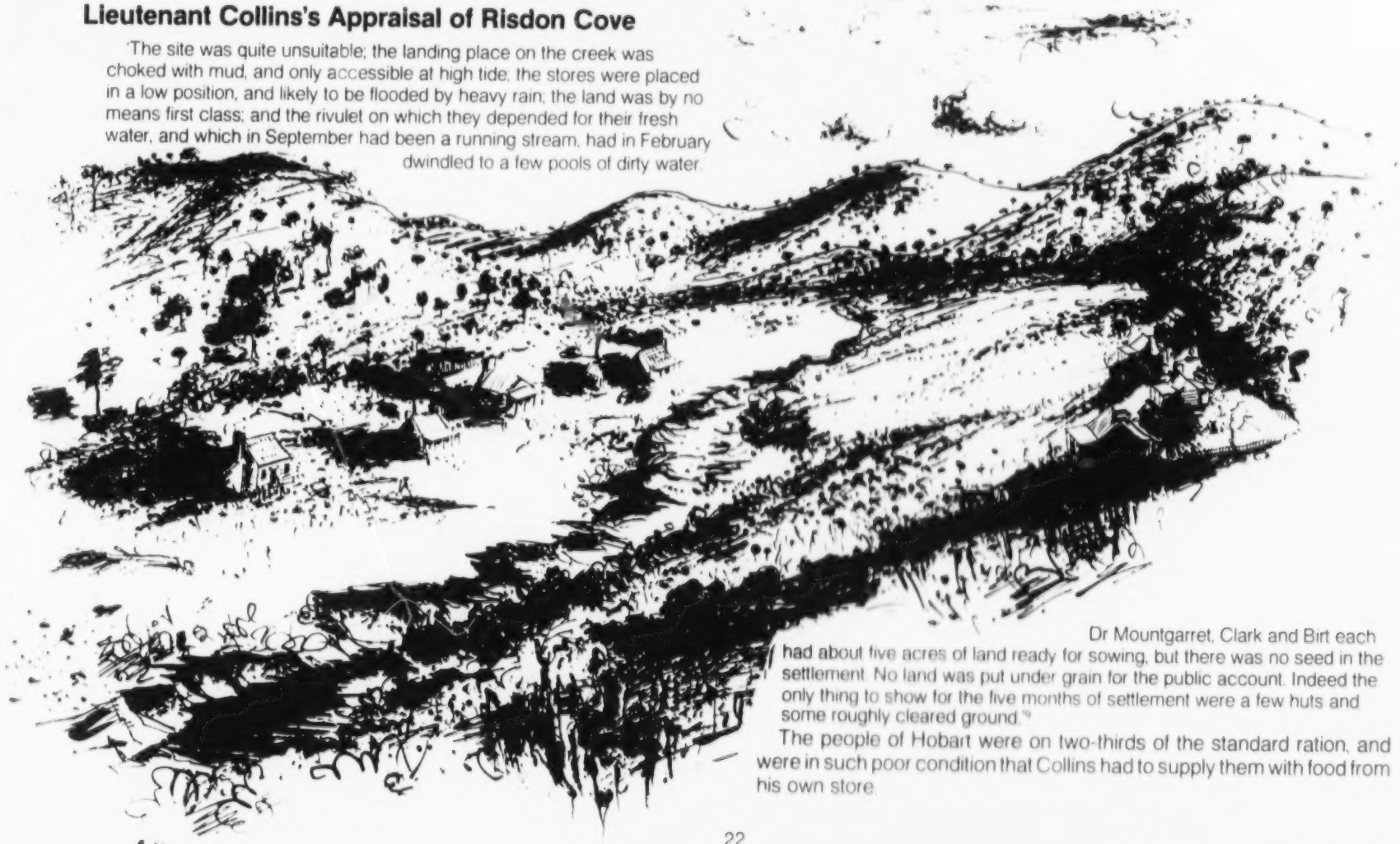
As we can read on page 20 the soldiers were almost as much trouble to Bowen as the convicts. They were never content and at the end of December 1803, one of the soldiers helped the convicts to steal some of the settlement's badly needed stores. Bowen did not really know how to deal with the offending soldier, because for some reason he could not court-martial him. So Bowen decided to travel with the offender to Port Jackson, (as Sydney was then called). He left Risdon Cove on January 9th, 1804.

When Lieutenant Bowen left he did not know that Governor King had already sent orders that he give up his command to Lieutenant David Collins.

Collins, and his group, arrived on two ships on February 15th 1804, and were met by Bowen's second-in-command, Lieutenant Moore. After examining the Risdon Cove site, Collins made up his mind that it was not suitable for a settlement. Part of his report to Governor King is given below.

Lieutenant Collins's Appraisal of Risdon Cove

'The site was quite unsuitable; the landing place on the creek was choked with mud, and only accessible at high tide; the stores were placed in a low position, and likely to be flooded by heavy rain; the land was by no means first class; and the rivulet on which they depended for their fresh water, and which in September had been a running stream, had in February dwindled to a few pools of dirty water.



Dr Mountgarret, Clark and Birt each had about five acres of land ready for sowing, but there was no seed in the settlement. No land was put under grain for the public account. Indeed the only thing to show for the five months of settlement were a few huts and some roughly cleared ground.'[9]

The people of Hobart were on two-thirds of the standard ration, and were in such poor condition that Collins had to supply them with food from his own store.

A New Site is Found

On the day after his landing, Lieutenant-Governor Collins was rowed down the river in search of a more suitable place for his settlement. He decided on a section of the river known as Sullivan's Cove and moved his stores to the new site. Collins thought that the condition of the Risdon Creek settlement was so bad that he even removed some of the starving pigs to the new camp across the river, to save their lives. A member of Collins' party, the Rev. Robert Knopwood, described the new site as 'a plain well calculated in every degree for a settlement'. For a brief period there were two settlements on the Derwent: one dying and the other just beginning. Collins's new settlement would grow to become Hobart Town.

Meanwhile Governor King sent orders for Lieutenant Bowen to return to Risdon and to prepare to give up his command. Governor King was annoyed that Lieutenant Bowen had travelled to Sydney without his permission. He felt Bowen had deserted his post. On receiving Governor King's orders, Bowen returned to Risdon. For a while Collins left him in charge of the old settlement. Collins did not want to have anything to do with the lazy convicts and mutinous soldiers on the opposite shore.

Mutiny at Risdon Cove

Bowen's last few months at Risdon did not go well for him. During the evening of April 21st 1804, several of the soldiers at Risdon became drunk. The next morning, when they were called out to duty, a few soldiers refused to stand on parade. It was also discovered that the convicts were planning an uprising. The soldiers, John Carr, William Burke, and William Page were sent to Sydney and court-martialled. Carr was sentenced to 1000 lashes and transportation to Risdon Cove for seven years. The other two received 500 lashes each.

The mutinous convicts were taken by Bowen to Smooth Island in Norfolk Bay and left with a month's provisions.* Bowen then took the opportunity to explore the Huon River. It was while Bowen was on this trip that the massacre took place.

When Bowen returned to Risdon on May 6th, 1804, an argument broke out between he and Lieutenant Moore. From their very first meeting they had been unfriendly towards each other. At one time Bowen called Moore, 'a mutinous rascal' and sent for his pistols to shoot him. The problem seemed to be that Lieutenant Moore was unwilling to accept Bowen as his commanding officer. Bowen was a naval officer while Moore was a soldier. Moore probably also resented the fact that the command of Risdon Cove had been passed from Bowen to Collins, and not to himself.

*Later on it became difficult to supply the marooned convicts and they were taken to Collins's new settlement and then returned to Port Jackson.

ACTIVITY

1. Imagine that you are Lieutenant Bowen. Write up your diary telling how you feel about the way your settlement has gone. Refer to some of the incidents that have occurred.

The Closure of the Settlement

On July 30th 1804, almost the entire population of the Risdon Cove settlement was put on the ship *Ocean* to return to Port Jackson. Bowen's stay in Van Diemen's Land had lasted just two days short of eleven months. Lieutenant-Governor Collins eventually made the settlement into a government farm. It was later granted to settlers. But what of Bowen? After finally receiving Governor King's orders, Bowen left the Derwent on board the *Ocean*. In 1805 he sailed for England. War had broken out between England and France, and he had hopes of gaining promotion in the conflict. His hopes were to be fulfilled. During the latter part of the war he was promoted to the rank of captain. He died in 1828.

By April, 1812, the area of the first settlement had been bought by a Colonel Andrew Geils. Geils was appointed commandant to Hobart until February, 1813, when Governor Thomas Davey arrived. In 1904 the area was given to the State by the owners of the land. The site was proclaimed a scenic reserve in 1920. In 1955 it was taken over by the Clarence Council. The site is now under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Follow-up Activities

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Some have described Bowen as being a poor commander. However, Governor King later praised the young lieutenant. What can we say in his favour?
2. Can we hold Bowen responsible for the failure of the settlement, given the men under his command?

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a short paragraph beginning 'The Risdon Settlement was doomed to failure because . . .' Now write one beginning 'The Risdon Settlement would have succeeded if . . .'
2. Construct a detailed biography of Lieutenant John Bowen or Lieutenant David Collins and prepare an interesting wallchart showing incidents in their lives.
3. Construct a time-line of the events in the life of Tasmania's first settlement. Use sketches where possible.
4. Conduct a trial scene (if you have not already done so) where Governor Arthur's Committee interviews Lieutenant Moore and the servant named White who witnessed the massacre. Get both sides of the story.
5. Find out about William Patterson and settlement in the north of the state.
6. Find out more about Collins's settlement at Sullivan's Cove.
7. Find out about the war between Britain and France during the early 1800s.
8. Find out about the 'Black War'. What happened to the island's Aboriginal population in the years after settlement?

Bibliography

Original sources

1 Evidence presented to Governor Arthur's Committee, 1830. A record of this evidence is housed in the Tasmanian State Archive's ***Committees and Boards of Enquiry,*** 1, pp. 39-41.

2 Governor Arthur's Committee op. cit.

3 Matthew Flinders. 'Observations on the Coast of Van Dieman's Land 1798-1799' in ***Historical Records of Australia,*** Series III, Vol. 2, pp. 5-9.

4 C.M.Clark. ***Select Documents in Australian History.*** Angus and Robertson, 1966, pp. 74-75.

5 Governor King to Bowen in ***H.R.A.,*** Series III, Vol. 1, p. 189.

6 Bowen to Governor King in ***H.R.A.,*** Series III, Vol. 1, pp. 196-8.

7 Logbook of the Lady Nelson in ***H.R.A.,*** Series III, Vol. 1.

8 Bowen to Governor King in ***H.R.A.,*** Series III, Vol. 1.

9 Collins to Governor King in ***H.R.A.,*** Series III, Vol. 1, pp. 221-4.

Other References

These references are excellent sources of additional information for both teachers and students.

Lennox, Geoff. ***The First Settlement in Tasmania*** (Risdon Cove Historic Site Project). Education Department and National Parks and Wildlife, Hobart, 1983.

Bolt, Frank and Lennox, Geoff. ***A Risdon Cove Diary*** (Risdon Cove Historic Site Project). Education Department and National Parks and Wildlife, Hobart, 1983.

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Kays, Malcolm. ***Investigating the Site of the Risdon Cove Settlement*** (Risdon Cove Historic Site Project). Education Department and National Parks and Wildlife, Hobart, 1983.

Robson, Lloyd. ***A History of Tasmania Vol. 1: Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855.*** Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983.

West, John. ***The History of Tasmania*** (Australian Classics Edition). Angus and Robertson, Melbourne, 1981.

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery publishes useful student material, including the following:

Hobart Town: The First 50 Years (free leaflet)
Sullivan's Cove: Birthplace of a Colony (free leaflet)
The Tasmanian Aboriginal People (free leaflet)

This leaflet contains selected information from Julia Clark's book ***The Aboriginal People of Tasmania*** (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 1983).

Additional material

The Tasmanian Collection at the State Library (Hobart) contains source books such as those published by the Tasmanian Historical Research Association. This group publishes papers four times a year. Their address is P.O. Box 441, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005.

Notes